



**Insurance and Real Estate Committee
February 2, 2009**

SD24

Testimony of the American Cancer Society

The American Cancer Society is urging your support of **HB 5024, An Act Concerning Health Insurance Coverage for Bone Marrow Testing.**

Bone marrow transplants are an important and effective treatment method for various diseases, including cancer. There are over 70 diseases that can be treated with bone marrow transplantation, including non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, leukemia, and other cancers.

There are many patients hopeful for bone marrow transplants; however there are many factors that determine how the immune system will react when it receives a transplanted organ. The most important factor for determining how the immune system will react to a transplant is to examine the donors and recipients human leukocyte antigen (HLA). How well the donor's and recipient's HLA tissue types match plays a large part in determining whether the transplant will be successful. Each person has 3 pairs of major HLA antigens for a total of 6 antigens, and there can be literally thousands of different combinations of possible HLA types. The result is that finding a match is extremely difficult.

Due to the difficulty of finding compatible antigens, a large amount of donors are needed to help find matches for patients. There is a 1 in 4 chance that a sibling would be a perfect match. Based on this ratio, many recipients are forced to turn to the general public to find a suitable donor. Those of the general public that wish to become bone marrow donors need to first have a blood test to determine what their HLA type is. This can cost the donor between \$50 and \$100. Their tissue type will then be kept on record with the National Marrow Donor Program until they reach the age of 60. There are many potential donors that may be deterred from donating due to the cost associated with the procedure. HB 4024 does not entice people to become donors; it will simply require insurance companies to pay for the procedure, as they would with any other blood test. This test is not complicated, and is the same procedure as taking blood to test for many other illnesses, presently covered by insurance companies.

The best chances of survival are cases where the donor and recipient are perfect matches, in those cases the chances of survival can be almost 100%. In cases where there are only 4 of the 6 antigens present, the survival rate may be between 15% and 30%. The need for perfect matches can be a matter of life and death. Insurance coverage for cancer treatment, especially for end of life care, can be significant. With the coverage provided for by HB 5024, we could increase the amount of donors and thereby decrease many end of life care treatments that insurance companies are required to pay. This bill will not only save lives, but it will also save money.

Please support this important piece of legislation for patients and donors.